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The aNATOMy of a course book: building blocks for teaching NATO terminology in English language classes

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Abstract. In our increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in the English language is essential for effective communication across borders. However, beyond basic vocabulary and grammar, understanding specialized terminology is instrumental, especially in such fields as international relations and security. Therefore, this paper explores the stages in integrating NATO terminology into English language classes to enhance military students' linguistic and geopolitical knowledge through the course book titled "*NATO English. Focus on Military Terminology*", an in-house teaching/learning material developed at the Romanian Naval Academy. Following a brief overview of NATO's history and the emphasis on its linguistic influence due to its multinational membership (English as its primary working language), the paper shows how this coursebook introduces the NATO-specific vocabulary and language functions in a systematic approach, with practical exercises and contextual insights. It also assesses its added value based on various aspects of its content, presentation, and utility as a teaching resource intended to create dynamic learning experiences that not only improve students' English language skills but also deepen their understanding of NATO and international security issues.

1. Introduction: Understanding NATO

Nowadays, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is acknowledged as an international military alliance with the main objective of ensuring the collective security of the member states through a common defense system.

Taking a few steps back in time, its history and evolution can be retraced: The year was 1949. The date: April 4th. It was then that a group of ten Western European countries together with the USA and Canada had founded the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) to counter potential threats from Germany and the Soviet Union. Or as American ex-president Truman pinned it in his address on the occasion of the signing, "in this pact, we hope to create a shield against aggression and the fear of aggression—a bulwark which will permit us to get on with the real business of government and society, the business of achieving a fuller and happier life for all our citizens." [1]

Other countries also joined in, and now – 75 years later – the Alliance has 32 members (Romania included), that is 32 countries in North America and Europe, it and operates on the principle that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all (Article 5). [2]

NATO also plays a crucial role in maintaining global peace and stability by promoting strategic cooperation and by strengthening the military capabilities of its members.

Thus, within the architecture of transatlantic security, NATO still stands as a strong, and constantly evolving pillar that copes with all threats and challenges arising in the 21st century.

2. Romania's involvement and role in global security alongside NATO

Romania plays a significant role within NATO, as it is actively contributing to regional and global security through its participation in various alliance missions and operations.

Since its accession in 2004, Romania has demonstrated its commitment to the principles and objectives of NATO by allotting the required resources to modernize and refurbish its armed forces as well as by participating in international missions to maintain peace and security. Even more so, as an essential aspect of Romania's role in NATO is its geostrategic positioning on the eastern border of the alliance, in a region that is constantly facing significant security challenges. [2]

This position allows Romania to contribute to NATO's security on the Eastern flank and to serve as an important military and logistical operations base. In this context, Romania hosts strategic facilities such as the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, which is used for the rotation of NATO and US troops and equipment in the region.

In addition, Romania has been an active participant in various NATO operations and missions, such as those in Afghanistan, the Western Balkans and the Black Sea. [3], [4], [5]

The country has also invested significantly in modernizing its armed forces, aligning itself with NATO standards and contributing to the alliance's collective defense capabilities. This includes purchasing modern equipment, participating in multinational exercises, and developing new cyber and intelligence capabilities. Through these efforts, Romania not only strengthens its own national security, but also strengthens the cohesion and efficiency of NATO as a whole body.

For the Naval Forces, NATO has a very significant strategic importance. The alliance facilitates cooperation between national navies, promoting interoperability and the exchange of critical information. Through joint exercises and coordinated operations, the navies of member countries improve their ability to respond effectively to maritime threats, including piracy, illegal trafficking and other illegal activities at sea. NATO also supports technological innovation and fleet modernization, ensuring that Allies have state-of-the-art equipment and advanced tactics to meet emerging challenges.

This collaboration strengthens not only regional but also global security by protecting critical shipping lanes and promoting a safe and stable maritime environment.

Throughout its history, Romania has always been striving to look for and to secure alliance policies that would give it firm security guarantees. The emergence of the modern Romanian national state as well as the state independence forced the national political elites, in a complicated, even hostile, European and international context, to consider a new vision of diplomacy and foreign policy. One of its main elements was the strategic defense of Romania on the Danube River and, after 1878, at sea.

Romanian statesman A.I. Cuza established the organization of river defense as top priority of his defense and security policies, and Romanian ex-Prime Minister Mihail Kogălniceanu created and strengthened Romania's maritime defense, according to his famous motto according to which "the key to our salvation is the Danube Road to the wide sea" (our translation). [6]

Ever since, the priority of Romania's defense and security at the river and at sea has represented a permanent concern of the state authorities to take effective measures and policies for the search and integration in a system of alliances that would ensure its territorial integrity.

Even after 1989, the Romanian foreign policy was coherent and continued to promote the traditional principles regarding respect for independence, national territorial integrity and national sovereignty. From this perspective, on the post-December Romanian foreign policy agenda, objectives such as: NATO integration became a priority, EU integration, relations with neighboring states and regional cooperation, relations with the Republic of Moldova, strategic partnerships, special bilateral relations, etc.

3. Why NATO English?

Given the linguistic diversity of its 32 member states, the linguistic influence of NATO is substantial within as well as outside the alliance. Seamless communication to facilitate coordination to achieve mission success is paramount. Therefore, in order to avoid navigating through a multitude of language and cultures, English – alongside French – has become the official language of NATO.

It provides a common linguistic framework for operational coordination and decision-making. Indeed, the use of English as working language allows for more effective cooperation and facilitates interoperability, joint exercises and multinational military operations.

It also promotes standardization of documentation and procedures, reducing the risk of misunderstandings and errors in communication. In addition to official languages, NATO invests in the language training of its personnel, encouraging the learning of other languages relevant to its operations, thus contributing to better integration and understanding between and among the armed forces of different member nations.

At diplomatic level, (NATO) English mitigates interaction between military and civilian leaders of different member states, or between NATO and its partners. Conferences, meetings and negotiations are often conducted in English to ensure a common understanding of goals, strategies and decisions. This helps to reinforce the alliance and promote unity within diversity, as well as solidarity between and among its members. [7]

4. Impact of teaching/learning NATO terminology

Teaching NATO terminology is crucial to ensuring efficiency and coherence within the alliance in terms of communication and operations. This not only facilitates interoperability, but also helps condense the risk of misunderstandings and communication errors that could result in compromising joint operational missions.

Moreover, interoperability plays a central part in the success of the alliance; therefore, the teaching of NATO terminology also assumes an essential role in achieving this objective. The armed forces of different member states need to collaborate effectively, which requires that communication be established without language or conceptual barriers.

By learning and using the same terminology, militaries from different countries can work together efficiently, regardless of their native language, and succeed in ensuring cohesion and efficiency in all operational aspects. [8], [9]

Similarly, the introduction and integration of NATO terminology into military training and education programs is essential for in the language and specialist training of military and civilian personnel who will participate in alliance operations. More precisely, good understanding of NATO terms and concepts will allow the military's quick adaptation to the international environment and task performance according to NATO standards.

5. Book description. A structured approach

Another significant year for Romania was 2022. This was a year of historic moves and decisions, and of great significance as Romania celebrated its 20 years since it had got the NATO joining invitation at the NATO Summit in Prague, and also 18 years since its accession to the allied structures. It was also the year when this double anniversary also coincided with the dramatic change in the strategic doctrine, and the reset of the North Atlantic Alliance's military position since the end of the Cold War: the decision and action of the Russian Federation to attack and invade Ukraine at dawn on February 24, 2022. Russia's military aggression against the neighboring state triggered NATO's immediate decisions and actions that had direct implications for Romania.

This is why we deemed it proper to such a background requires better understanding of the implications that NATO's strategic concept has on the national security of Romania.

Also, it is a well-known fact that at the heart of defense lies terminology, which not only forms the foundation for a common understanding but also builds successful interoperability. When deployed in military operations and exercises, the forces of NATO's member countries and their partners need to

speak the same language and use the same technical standards, so a shared communication system is fundamental.

This has become one major objective to be attained by students in the university study programs at Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy of Constanta; therefore, the coursebook – *NATO English. Focus on Terminology* – has been specifically designed for them. [10]

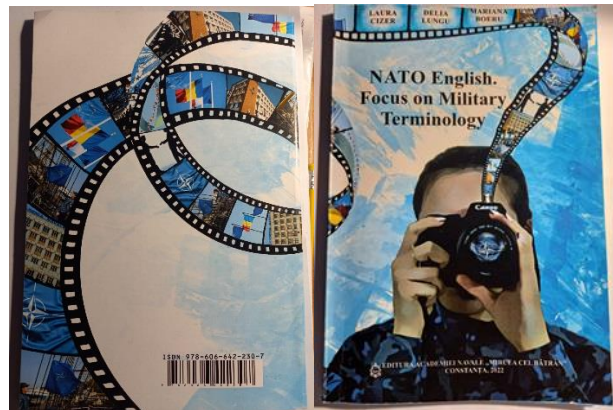


Figure 1 Book cover

It introduces the NATO-specific vocabulary and the language functions, and includes practice activities in all four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. It tackles exclusively specialist-related topics with a view to acquiring and developing NATO-operational terminology that facilitate seamless work in a multinational environment.

The elements of NATO terminology are taken from official sources and documents and are based on authentic texts that have been adapted. [11]

More precisely, in the ten units (see Figure 2) within the book, students are exposed to particular concepts, terms, abbreviations, acronyms, and definitions, notes and examples through activities based on text selections, video clips, diagrams and illustrations intended to build multiple skills.

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Figure 2 Table of contents (book)

The coursebook addresses not only to the novices but equally to the connoisseurs, and it is designed to meet the specific English language needs not only for students but also for specialists for whom it might serve as an exhaustive refresher. It proves to be an important means of teaching/learning and practicing by enriching the vocabulary with terms specific to military terminology.

The task-based activities within are aimed at consolidating, systematizing and considerably broadening the English language knowledge acquired through a previous study. The coursebook is designed in a modern style, each of the 10 units contains task-based activities from all four skills according to STANAG 6001: listening, speaking, reading, writing.

Methodologically, each unit was conceived as an integrated skills approach: it revolved around a listening activity with reading, writing, and speaking activities as a spinoff.

There is also to be noticed that the boundary line between the English language knowledge and NATO knowledge is completely missing. It is a real challenge for all the military, young or more experienced, who, once faced with this challenge, tend to prove their knowledge about the North Atlantic Alliance, without realizing that in this way they are actually practicing their skills very well mentioned before.

The coursebook, therefore, aims to strengthen the knowledge of the English language of future officers, develop the abilities of understanding and expression, review some grammatical problems as well as expand the vocabulary, by using an appropriate specialized language, the knowledge and use of which in real situations is important and necessary during the missions they will participate in alongside their NATO partners.

The book also contains an *Answer Key* that provides support for self-study while the *Transcripts* combine the reading and listening skills as learning new words in print (by reading text) and by ear (by listening) will help students stick them to their memory.

Last but not least, the *Annexes* add more information bits that enrich students' knowledge on NATO matters, as they contain: the 14 articles of the North Atlantic Treaty, the NATO phonetic alphabet, numbers in the military, and the military time, NATO logo, flag, motto, a list of NATO abbreviations and acronyms, military ranks in the Navy, officer paygrade, a comparative list of American and British English military terms, and a list of standardized military terms used in NATO communications known as prowords).

The coursebook represents a useful and interesting study material, taking into account the fact that any specialized text, in English, as well as any review of vocabulary knowledge and correct expression, is a step forward for a better preparation of future naval officers.

Finally, the coursebook *NATO English. Focus on military terminology* (published in 2022) comes as a corollary 18 years after Romania's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance, with a synthesis of the most important elements that the authors wished to bring to the readers' attention, thus creating a bridge between *What is NATO?* (the title of the first unit in the book) and *We are NATO*, the phrase which acts as one of NATO logos. [12]

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the devised in-house material under discussion here is an excellent tool for both teaching and self-studying. Although it covers only part of the specialized notions, by working on and exposing to them, learners will be able to improve their language skills in the field of NATO military terminology.

Ultimately, teaching NATO terminology is essential to ensure efficiency, interoperability and cohesion within the alliance as it contributes to fulfilling successfully joint missions and operations, as well as to strengthening security and stability at international level.

In our capacity of educators, policymakers, or advocates for language learning, it is vital to acknowledge the importance of using English for teaching NATO terminology in order to make the next generation of global citizens linguistically as well as geopolitically literate.

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